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NOTES

A CONJECTURE ON MATTHEW XI, 12

The very multiplicity of the attempts which have been made to solve the exegetical problem presented by the difficult Logion of St. Matthew 11, 12 is in itself a strong indication that no one of the proffered interpretations can claim for itself a pre-eminent position; and inasmuch as all the thought that has been expended upon the Saying has not succeeded in discovering in it a meaning that by its inherent probability compels us to accept it as the true interpretation, it is inevitable that we should wonder whether some error can have crept into the text.

The manuscripts and versions, it is true, are singularly unanimous in their support of the traditional text; nevertheless I venture to submit a conjecture which has, as I think, the merit of giving to the Logion a much more intelligible meaning than any that has hitherto been proposed.

The evidence of the papyri and kindred sources agrees with the testimony of the literary sources in showing that it is permissible to take *βιάζεται* either as middle or as passive. Whichever voice is adopted the clause in which the word occurs plainly speaks of violent opposition between the Kingdom and some opposing force, and the second clause, *καὶ βιασται ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν*, taken in conjunction with the preceding words, can scarcely bear any other meaning than that the Kingdom is being worsted in the conflict. Herein lies the real difficulty of the Logion, and most of the current interpretations are attempts to expound the words without looking this obvious difficulty in the face. We cannot of course think that Jesus would speak of the Kingdom of Heaven as being worsted in any encounter, and the purpose of this Note is to suggest that the kingdom spoken of in the Logion as being hard pressed is not the Kingdom of Heaven at all.

The Gospel records leave us in no doubt that our Lord shared the conception current among His contemporaries that over against the Kingdom of God, in constant and violent opposition to it, stood a Kingdom of Evil. In the Beelzeboul discourse he speaks of it as the Kingdom of Satan: *καὶ εἰ ὁ Σατανᾶς τὸν Σατανᾶν ἐκβάλλει, ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν ἐμερίσθη· πῶς οὖν σταθῇσεται ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ;* (Matt. 12, 26).

Now is it possible that in the Logion which we are discussing Jesus is speaking of the Kingdom of Satan? If we could substitute τοῦ

Σατανᾶ for τῶν οὐρανῶν all the obscurity would at once disappear; we could then take βιάζεται as passive and find in the Logion the statement that ever since the days of John's ministry the Kingdom of Satan was being hard pressed, and that those who were storming it were getting the upper hand. But why and how did τῶν οὐρανῶν replace τοῦ Σατανᾶ? Is it possible to suggest any reasonable explanation of the substitution of the one for the other? It seems hopeless to discover any reason why in the Greek the words τῶν οὐρανῶν should have supplanted a more original τοῦ Σατανᾶ. But could the substitution have been effected before the words of our Lord had been translated into Greek — while they were still being reported and written in their original Aramaic? In Aramaic the Kingdom of Heaven would be מַלְכוּתָא דְּשִׁמְיָא, while the expression corresponding to the Kingdom of Satan would be מַלְכוּתָא דְּשַׁטָּנָא; and the two expressions are sufficiently alike graphically to make confusion easily possible.

That the initial letter of the Hebrew word for kingdom is *shin* while that of the word for Satan is *sin* is no proof that in Aramaic the former would be spelt with ש and the latter invariably with ס. It is true that the Hebrew ש is more usually represented in Aramaic by ס, but in every period of Aramaic the interchange of ש and ס is common. In the particular case of the word Satan the Targums and Talmudic literature show both forms שַׁטָּנָא and סַטָּנָא in common use. The latter is rather more frequently used, but the former is quite usual.¹

It will be noticed that in modern Square Hebrew the letters which are *not* identical in the two words which, as we suggest, were confused (namely the letters מַי and מַנ) are not very dissimilar; but the possibility has to be borne in mind that they may not have been so much alike, and that consequently confusion would be less probable, in the script employed when our Lord's sayings were first written in Aramaic. Our knowledge, however, of the precise form in which the Logia were current in his day and later is so meagre that it is not safe to be dogmatic. It is highly probable that the old Square Hebrew (see Column v, page 71 of Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. I) was in use in the lifetime of Jesus,² and in that script it was by no means impossible for the error suggested in this Note to have arisen.

As to the Aramaic underlying the words βιάζεται and βιασταί, it would not be difficult to suggest expressions which would be in har-

¹ For some of these facts I am indebted to my friend and colleague, Professor S. H. Hooke.

² See Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. I, p. 74a (Taylor), and Vol. IV, p. 949a (Kenyon).

mony with what we conceive to have been the original meaning of the Logion. For example, Dalman's rendering of the two words, which makes **DNK** its starting-point, would suit our emendation of the text quite as well as it suits Dalman's own interpretation.³

When we remind ourselves of the frequency with which the phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven' occurred in the reports of the Master's discourses, we realize how easy it would be for some early scribe to mistake a chance occurrence of words in some measure similar for just another instance of the great phrase that so frequently recurred.

It is significant, as affording some corroboration of our hypothesis, that in Matt. 12, 29 Jesus uses the verb ἀρπάζω of plundering the goods of the Strong Man — the very verb employed in our Logion, as we interpret it, to describe the successful onset of the new forces of righteousness upon the Kingdom of Satan.

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THE TEXT OF LUKE II, 22

This verse contains a textual problem which has perplexed editors of the New Testament since the days of Erasmus and the Complutensian edition. The question is, What pronoun should be read after καθαρισμοῦ? — αὐτῶν, or αὐτοῦ, or αὐτῆς?

Αὐτῶν is attested by **ⲚⲀⲖⲖⲘⲘⲓⲛ** etc., by nearly all the minuscules, by the Peshitta, the Hareclean, and the Palestinian Syriac, and by three minor ancient versions (Ethiopic, Armenian, and Gothic). The Arabic Diatessaron also has the plural pronoun, agreeing with the Peshitta at this point. Origen found αὐτῶν in his text of the Gospel, and, so far as is known, he was acquainted with no other reading in this place. He quotes Luke 2, 22 in his Fourteenth Homily on Luke, which deals with the Circumcision and Purification, and he discusses the difficulty involved in the plural αὐτῶν without mentioning any variant reading. If he had known of such, he would certainly have made some reference to it. The Homiliae in Lucam were written at Caesarea, after Origen's withdrawal to that city from Alexandria in the year 231. We may therefore assume that αὐτῶν formed part of Luke 2, 22 in the text current at Caesarea and Alexandria in the early

³ *The Words of Jesus* (English Translation), pp. 141, 142.